



# Talking with Your Children about Ebola and Your Deployment

It's likely that your children may be aware of the current Ebola outbreak in West Africa. It's important to help your children understand why a parent is leaving and what their role is in fighting the outbreak. The information below provides a guide on ways to discuss these topics with your children. Keep in mind that the specific information you provide should be tailored to your children's maturity levels, coping styles, and concerns.

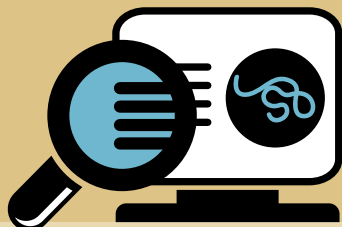
## 1. Ask your children what they know about Ebola and your deployment.

- Listen for underlying fears or concerns and any misinformation your children might tell you about.
- Don't make it a one-time conversation. Continue to talk with your children and answer any new questions as they come up.
- Limit your children's exposure to news reports and other media. Data have shown that nonstop exposure to media reports makes the risk to them seem bigger than it actually is.



## 2. Gently correct inaccurate information.

- If your children tell you incorrect information about Ebola or the deployment, let them know the correct information clearly in terms they can understand.
- To check facts about Ebola, go to reliable sources such as the CDC website: [www.cdc.gov/ebola](http://www.cdc.gov/ebola).



## 3. Allow your children to express their feelings about the deployment.

- If they feel worried, they are worried. Don't tell them they shouldn't be worried. Instead, encourage them to talk about how they are feeling. Remind them that it is natural to be concerned, and then let them know what you will do to stay safe for them.
- Be a good role model for your children by telling them about your own concerns. Do this in a way that won't scare them. For example, let them know that you're also sad about the separation.
- Tell your children how the deployment will be helping people. Ask them to understand that many people in the world need the help you are providing, and they can be proud of the part you play.
- Tell your children how you dealt with your feelings, and help them figure out what they might try to comfort themselves while you're away. For example, writing in their journal, spending time with a pet, playing soccer, or talking with others.
- In times of stress, children may require extra patience, care, and love. Children may not be able to tell you they are stressed. Instead, they may show changes in behavior including irritability, being more clingy or aggressive, having sleep problems, showing stronger reactions to minor difficulties, or other behavioral changes.
- Children who are stressed may respond by acting out in school. It is important to talk to your child about any problems at school and to let them share their feelings.
- If you are concerned about how your child is coping, contact a pediatrician, other primary health care provider, a school counselor, or a qualified mental health care specialist.



#### 4. Answer their questions in ways that will reassure them.

- Empathize with their concerns first.
- Remain calm and confident, keeping your answers simple and direct.
- Carefully think about answers that will reassure your children and relieve their worries about Ebola and the deployment, avoiding graphic details.
- Let your children know what you will be doing to stay safe for them, and what you will be doing to keep them safe.
- Give your children practical advice to help them stay healthy, like washing their hands, eating healthy foods, and getting enough rest.
- Provide them with a response that they may use when being questioned about the deployment.



#### 5. Helping children cope with any fears or concerns.

- Children can feel stressed when they feel helpless. Giving children a role during the separation can help them feel like they are supporting the mission. Their role could include things like doing well in school, or helping with specific tasks at home.
  - Maintain your normal, healthy routines. Make sure your children get enough rest, physical activity, and healthy foods.
  - Plan for the child to keep a connection to you during the separation. This could be through phone calls or video chat applications when possible, texting, or email. If ongoing contact is not possible, consider leaving notes to your child, or videos of you reading or talking to the child that they can watch while you are away. If possible, have the child send pictures and emails to you while you are away.
  - It is also important for the caregivers at home to take care of themselves so they are able to do their best in caring for their children during the deployment. Parents can seek support from friends, relatives, and community agencies.



### Other Resources for Families of Deployers with Children

- For more information on common concerns and important messages for parents concerning the Ebola epidemic, visit the Healthy Children website at <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/infections/Pages/Ebola.aspx>.
- For additional tips on how to talk to your child about Ebola, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics website at <http://aapnews.aappublications.org/content/early/2014/10/07/aapnews.20141007-1>.
- For further tips on how to talk to your child about Ebola, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/vhf/ebola/pdf/how-talk-children-about-ebola.pdf>.
- For more information on how to help you and your child prepare for your deployment, visit the Military OneSource website at <http://www.militaryonesource.mil/parenting/deployment-issues>.
- For up-to-date information on Ebola safety, visit <http://intranet.cdc.gov/od/odweb/ebolaSafety.htm>.
- Talking with Children: Tips for Caregivers, Parents, and Teachers During Infectious Disease Outbreaks <http://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/SMA14-4886/SMA14-4886.pdf>.
- Supporting Your Child While a Parent Is Deployed: <http://www.zerotothree.org/about-us/funded-projects/military-families/cameraready3.pdf>.
- Guidelines for minimizing the negative effects of watching the news can be found at [https://www.aacap.org/App\\_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts\\_for\\_families/67\\_children\\_and\\_the\\_news.pdf](https://www.aacap.org/App_Themes/AACAP/docs/facts_for_families/67_children_and_the_news.pdf).

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